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AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND,

ON THE

INEXPEDIENCY OF DISSOLVING

THE

PRESENT PARLIAMENT.

BY AN

INDEPENDENT FREEHOLDER OF MIDDLESEX.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR LOCKYER DAVIS, IN HOLBORN; AND SOLD BY C. PYNE, IN PATER-NOSTER-ROW.

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AN

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE OF ENGLAND.

THE frequency of parliaments hath always been eſteemed the bulwark of Engliſh liberties; and the people have been ever jealous of any exertion of the royal prerogative, however juſtifiable, upon the body of their

repreſentatives. Since one monarch of Great-Britain forfeited his life, and another his crown at the ſhrine of liberty, but eſpecially ſince the goodly building of our conſtitution was finally compleated by the acceſſion of the preſent royal family, parliaments have been held in the higheſt veneration; and the houſe of commons has been looked upon by wiſe and diſpaſſionate men as one of the moſt auguſt aſſemblies in the world, as an adequate repreſentation of the people, and a ſufficient balance both to the prerogative of the king, and the power of the nobility: elected by the free choice of the people, and compoſed of gentlemen the moſt eminent for their abilities, or the moſt reſpectable for their eſtates or fortunes, what ſet of men can human wiſdom deviſe ſo fit as this, to act as the delegates of the people, in all the great affairs of ſo opulent and extended an empire as that of Great-Britain.

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That every people ſhould deſire as great a ſhare of freedom as is conſiſtent with good government is juſt---is natural. Civil ſociety, however, cannot ſubſiſt at all, unleſs every individual will conſent to give up a certain ſhare of that liberty, to which he has an inconteſtable right by the law of nature. This it is which has made the republican ſo favourite a form of government; becauſe in this, every member of ſociety having an immediate ſhare in the conduct of public affairs, and being even eligible to the higheſt offices of the ſtate, appears to act with more uncontrouled freedom than in other forms, where far the greateſt part are only mediately concerned in the adminiſtration of public affairs. It has, however, been found true by long experience, that ſuch a conſtitution can ſubſiſt only in very ſmall ſtates, where the people may be aſſembled without difficulty and tumult, and which

have little or no foreign concerns; or where a rigid and inflexible virtue prevails through all ranks and orders of men: however deſirable, therefore, it may be in theory, ſuch a conſtitution is clearly incompatible with the ſtate of this country, whether we conſider the extent of our dominion or the conduct of our morals. The experiment, indeed, was tried even after the ſovereign had been brought to the block by the ſubject; but with what ill ſucceſs let the hiſtory of the laſt century inform us. When a ſucceeding monarch abdicated the throne, the nation were too wiſe to repeat the experiment, and happily ſecured their liberties without altering the ancient form of the conſtitution. The government of England, ever ſince it was a united nation, had been ſtrictly monarchical, though not conſtantly hereditary in practice, nor without ſuch limitations as a powerful nobility, and

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a people ever averſe from arbitrary power, and highly jealous of their liberties, impoſed upon the ſovereign. The nation, therefore, even when provoked by the moſt outrageous attacks upon their religion, liberties, and laws, made no objection to the *office* of ſupreme magiſtrate, which time had ſanctified, and experience had aſſured them was moſt agreeable to the genius of theſe kingdoms. Their whole rage was juſtly pointed at the perſon who had done the injury, and they were content to have a king, provided he was not a tyrant, but the father of his people, the guardian, not the ſuſpender of their laws, whoſe higheſt prerogative ſhould be that of becoming the ſupreme protector of his ſubjects rights and liberties; they were content to ſecure for themſelves and their poſterity thoſe invaluable privileges which the ſucceſsful ſtruggles for liberty againſt the attempts of arbi-

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trary power had gained them, by truſting them in the hands of thoſe whom they, by their own free choice, ſhould elect to be your repreſentatives.

After all this, if we ſhould hear a cry throughout the nation, deſiring the monarch on the throne to exert his royal prerogative in *diſſolving* the aſſembly of their repreſentatives, could we ſuppoſe it to be the voice of freedom? Or ſhould we not rather think it the rude clamour of ſedition, or the foul trumpet of rebellion? The voice of the people hath, indeed, been ſaid to be the voice of GOD, I believe, on no good foundation: this I am ſure of, that the latter is deſcribed to be *a ſtill, ſmall one*.

But, ſuppoſe a houſe of commons, at ſome diſtant period, to become corrupt, and baſely to betray the rights and liberties

of

of their conſtituents: to wield the ſcourge of oppreſſion themſelves, or to bow their own necks to the yoke of ſlavery. Shall Engliſhmen (you will ſay) then ſtand tamely by, and become either the ſlaves of ſlaves or of petty tyrants?----God forbid that any one who breathes the air of this free and happy country ſhould harbour a thought ſo baſe and abject.

But conſider well, my beloved countrymen, the truth of every allegation before you proceed to paſs ſentence in a matter of ſuch high conſequence: conſider the excellence of the conſtitution, as at preſent eſtabliſhed: weigh well the horrors of civil commotions, and the dreadful conſequences of introducing diſorder into the government: reflect on the danger of abetting thoſe who, under the ſpecious pretext of vindicating

your

your liberties, would render you ſubſervient to their vanity or ambition.

In purſuing violent meaſures, and in making conſiderable changes, we ought always to conſider, whether the convulſions and diſorders which, in all human probability, will be the conſequences of thoſe meaſures or changes, may not be in themſelves more injurious than the evils which they profeſs to cure. In human affairs we ſee imperfection every where around us: our prudence is exerted principally in chooſing that which ſeems to bring the leaſt evil along with it. Far be from us all mean ſervility and paſſive ſubjection to arbitrary power, whatever title it may bear. Yet nothing is more true than this----that the reaſons ſhould be extremely urgent, and the inconveniences we ſuffer next to intolerable, before we enter upon any material changes

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of the conſtitution. Nothing can be more ridiculous than to adhere to cuſtoms, merely becauſe they are old; and yet innovations are always dangerous, and often productive of more ill conſequences than we are aware of. In beaten paths we are well acquainted with every precipice and danger; on known ſhores we are able to avoid the rocks and ſhallows; but when we tread unbeaten ways, or launch out to unknown coaſts, we eaſily loſe our way, and ſplit on hidden rocks which we were not taught to avoid. The humane ſurgeon will not raſhly hazard the amputation of a limb, 'till he is convinced that he cannot with ſafety preſerve it: the ſkilful phyſician would in ſome caſes be glad to raiſe a fever for his patient's benefit, did he not diſtruſt his power of laying it again.

Thus it is in the preſent caſe---if the Houſe of Commons do not, in every point, come up to the wiſhes of the people, purſue meaſures which they do not always approve, the people have an undoubted right to ſignify their diſpleaſure, and to make it known to their Repreſentatives. But, at the ſame time, they, to whom the people have entruſted their rights, are to act for themſelves, and to be governed by their own conſciences: they ought, indeed, to pay a proper attention to the opinions of their conſtituents; but, at the ſame time, they muſt act by their own: otherwiſe they were mere machines and lifeleſs inſtruments, meant only to echo the voices of others; and ſurely the people of England would not wiſh to be repreſented by ſuch mock ſenators as theſe.

To quarrel with thoſe whom you have ſo lately choſen, and to deſire a new ſet of men for your Repreſentatives, if it be not founded on the moſt cogent reaſons, is an argument of great weakneſs and inconſtancy. No force was put upon you in your choice, and no more influence uſed than muſt and will be uſed again by the great, the rich, and thoſe who are in power: if we will not allow ſuch to have influence we muſt give up civil ſociety, which cannot ſubſiſt without an inequality in riches and power among it's members, and theſe muſt in the nature of things ever give a weight to thoſe who poſſeſs them.

But they will not permit you to have the man of your choice.----This is the great evil, and that for which you deſire a diſſolution of the preſent Parliament. And is this cauſe ſufficient for purſuing ſuch vio-

lent meaſures? Or are the affairs of this nation come to ſuch a criſis as to depend upon one man's having or not having a ſeat in the houſe of commons? Upon mature reflection it will appear extremely inſignificant; and if you are ſo ridiculouſly obſtinate as to perſiſt in electing a man whom the majority of the houſe judge not fit to ſit among them, the fault is your own, if a man whom you diſlike is obtruded upon you. The Conſtitution gives you the power of electing your Repreſentatives---but when they are choſen, who can be judges of their fitneſs or unfitneſs to ſit in the Houſe but the Houſe of Commons themſelves? This is privilege which is claimed by every petty club in the kingdom; and the worſhipful ſocieties of free-maſons, bucks, or ſupporters of the bill of rights, in tavern aſſembled, would eſteem it a high infringement of their liberties to have a member forced upon

upon them againſt their will by any man or body of men whatſoever. If the Houſe of Commons are not to be the judges in this caſe, ſhall the King, or the Houſe of Lords, determine who are fit members of the Houſe of Commons? Or rather that moſt reſpectable aſſembly who, though they *Reſolved* the people of Coventry to be too contemptible for their notice, yet have agreed as a high court of judicature, to *determine* on the caſe of Mr. Vaughan, one of their own *members*; doubtleſs this ſupreme court will afterwards proceed to take into conſideration the caſe of *Mr. Green*, and other gentlemen equally eminent, and perhaps expel them, if not declare them incapable of ſerving in their ſociety.

Serioufly, no part of the legiſlature but the houſe of commons, not the whole Legiſlature, nor the body of the people at large,

large, can have any thing to do in this matter, which concerns the houſe of commons alone. Nor, ſuppoſing they have acted in a manner that the majority of the County of Middleſex diſlike, can it be eſteemed a ſufficient cauſe to deſire ſo unprecedented, I may ſay ſo unconſtitutional a meaſure as the diſſolution of the Parliament.

But if the evil of which you complain were ever ſo great, yet it is of ſhort duration: it is only during the remainder of ſeven years that the grievances, which you ſuppoſe yourſelves to ſuffer, can endure. At the end of that ſhort period you will again be free to elect whom you pleaſe for your Repreſentatives; and if at that time you ſhould ſuffer yourſelves to be influenced in your choice by miniſterial power, or any ſelfiſh views; or if you ſhould ridiculouſly perſiſt in chooſing men, who having bid

adieu

adieu to decency of every kind, are unfit to take a place among your Repreſentatives---whom ſhall you have to thank but yourſelves? Would it not then be more expedient to ſuffer the evils which you complain of, allowing them to be ſuch, than to call in the aid of the royal prerogative, and to enter upon meaſures unheard of ſince the happy ſettlement of our conſtitution, and which may be of dangerous conſequence to thoſe very liberties of which you are now ſo jealous?

But what if, after all, the grievances of which you complain ſhould be chiefly imaginary, the creatures of your own brains, or rather phantoms conjured up by diſcontented or reſtleſs perſons to affright you from your duty? Some of them are abſolutely falſe, others trifling and beneath your notice, and all of them (after the nature of phan-

phantoms) much magnified and diſtorted, in order to convey the more terror. Examine to the bottom, and ſee what real cauſes you have for diſquiet. A monarch on the throne, whoſe many amiable qualities and unimpeached virtues, render him, by your own confeſſions, truly the father of his people: a conſtitution well eſtabliſhed, and excellently adapted to ſecure the liberties of the nation: freedom beyond that which is enjoyed by any other people: an extenſive and profitable trade without, together with peace and plenty within the kingdom. Mark well the bleſſings you enjoy, and how well they are ſecured to you; and then tell me wherefore all theſe ungrateful murmurings and complainings? Conſider with yourſelves whether they are not the offſpring of diſcontent and ill humour, or a flame ſtudiouſly blown up by reſtleſs and ſeditious ſpirits. If you lived in a good neigh-

neighbourhood, ſurrounded by perſons of whoſe friendſhip and goodneſs you was well aſſured, ſhould you not ſuſpect any noiſy riotous perſons, who ſhould come and inform you that theſe very neighbours, in whom you have ſo much reaſon to confide, intend to ſet your houſe on fire, and rob you of your moſt valuable effects? And ſhould you not ſuppoſe that they had ſome ſecret deſign in this ſeeming friendſhip of making an advantage of your terrors, or of cozening you under the maſk of affection?

As affairs are now managed, the ſober and rational part of the kingdom dread the ſeptennial return of elections for Members of Parliament. Such is the mean and corrupted ſtate of the People, that there is an univerſal expectation on theſe occaſions of riotous mirth and intemperate feaſting,---

if of nothing worſe. What wiſe or good man has been ſpectator of the diſorders which fill the land at theſe times, and would wiſh to ſee a return of them ſo ſoon, or delight in the proſpect of univerſal gluttony and drunkenneſs? The corrupt, the idle, and the diſſolute, may indeed wiſh for another opportunity of indulging their vices at the expence of others; but every ſober man muſt lament, that the *morals* of the people neceſſarily ſuffer once in ſeven years, in ſupport of their *civil liberties*. And who are they that reap the benefit of the immenſe ſums which are diſſipated and ſquandered on theſe occaſions?---not the poor and needy, but the victuallers and publicans. What cauſe do they ſerve?---not that of virtue and our country, but of intemperance, riot, and corruption. And do the people of England deſerve an uncorrupted Houſe of Repreſentatives, when they are thus,

thus, in a point that moſt nearly concerns them, corrupt themſelves?

If they who boaſted to be free men of Rome, when Rome was free, had without reſerve ſold their ſuffrages---ſhould we not have laughed to have found them complaining that their Senate was not uncorrupted, and that the members of it ſometimes poſtponed the public to their own private advantage.

But, ſay they who boaſt themſelves to be the patrons of freedom, our houſe ſhall be a houſe of patriots, but ye have made it a den of penſioners and placemen.---Show thyſelf then thou amiable corps of diſintereſted Patriots, with the ſelf-denying ordinance in your hands. How goodly a ſight muſt it be to view five hundred men of the beſt fortune and abilities in the kingdom pricking

forth, like Knights-Errant of old, armed cap-a-pie with patriotiſm, the cap of liberty on their heads, and the lance of freedom in their hands, leaping all at once into the gulph, without view of any other reward, ſave that which is the neceſſary conſequence of virtue! How expedient, how grateful! That they who endure the toil of legiſlation and tranſact your whole buſineſs for you, who labour continually for the public good, and give up their own buſineſs and repoſe for your ſakes, ſhould be the only perſons excluded from taſting the advantages of thoſe poſts and places which their fortunes, abilities, and converſation in public buſineſs, render them moſt proper to execute.

Before you raſhly deſire another parliament, conſider the ſtate of the nation, and ſee whether in that view you are likely to gain any great advantage; without which, ſuch

ſuch a meaſure cannot be eligible. The extenſiveneſs of your trade and dominion, together with the vaſt expences occaſioned by foreign wars, and the neceſſary protection of foreign appendages to Great Britain have by degrees neceſſarily created immenſe funds, without ſupporting which, national credit muſt fail at once, and your extenſive trade receive a mortal wound. Theſe funds have produced a large crop of places; which, being by the conſtitution of this country in the gift of the Sovereign, have ſtrengthened him whom concurrent circumſtances had conſpired to weaken: thus by means not foreſeen, keeping up the due balance of power in the different parts of the Conſtitution. 'Till the five hundred Knights-Errant from the land of Patriotiſm make their appearance, theſe lucrative places will be objects of deſire and tempting baits in a nation of expence and luxury,

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where the conſideration of ſelf uſually takes the lead, and diſintereſted virtue is either made a laughing-ſtock or a ſtalking-horſe to vice.

Suppoſe then the Parliament to be no more----can you imagine that the Court will drop all it's influence, and ſuffer men to be choſen who, under the cloak of popularity, mean only to thruſt out the preſent ſervants of the Crown, and violently to obtrude themſelves upon the Sovereign? Or can you be ſo weak as to imagine that your preſent favourites are the only men in the nation who with unbiaſſed integrity will ever conſult the public good, and take nothing to themſelves? Perhaps the beſt way to convince you of your error, would be to let theſe men ſeize the prey, which they are ſo greedy after; and then you would ſee, that whether Whig or Tory, in or out,

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Placeman or Grumbler, Mens deſigns in general are, along with the good of their country, not totally to neglect their own private emolument.

Your deſigns and intenſions, my beloved Countrymen, are, I am perſuaded not bad: ----your hearts are in general good; your affections warm----but you are too violent ----too good natured----too credulous. You ſuffer yourſelves to be fired by every ſpark of grievance that falls in your way: you are led aſtray too eaſily by any artful man who will tell you a plauſible tale. Let not the world any longer laugh at you, becauſe you muſt always have a bottle-conjurer or a patriot, a ghoſt or a petition, to amuſe you. We have all of us work enough of our own to do; let us mind that, and when the noiſe of grievances and apprehenſions, bill of rights and petitions, is bawled

bawled into our ears, before we join in the general huzza, let us be ſure firſt that we underſtand what is meant, and then let us quietly conſult our own feelings, not the unmeaning jargon or noiſy eloquence of others. Let us aſk ourſelves ſuch plain ſimple queſtions as theſe.----Do I really feel any other inconveniences than what proceed from my own fault or folly, or elſe what I might reaſonably expect in this imperfect ſtate wherein I am placed?----Am I not at full liberty to enjoy the fruits of my honeſt labour in my own way without reſtraint?----Have I not the power of acting as I pleaſe, ſo long as I do not offend againſt the laws of my country?----Have I not as much liberty as a virtuous man and good citizen ought to deſire?----Is not my property ſecure---my perſon ſafe?----Am I not to the full as happy as the richeſt and greateſt man in the nation; or if I am not,

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is it not my own fault ?----Inſtead of liſtening to the noiſe of riot and tumult, let us, I ſay, aſk ourſelves ſuch queſtions as theſe; and leave the humour of petitioning to thoſe whoſe inſatiable appetites or neceſſities, will not let them wait ſeven years, to make another ſale of their liberties and conſciences.

THE END.